About Mr. Ben Baran.



Mr. Ben, his wife and boy, 2009

Masaaki Sasaki, Pastor,
Nishikyushu Church
January 19, 2014

In the fall of 1983, Ben was working with a pastor. He himself was not yet a Christian, but his wife had begun attending our church, which had just opened in a small

settlement about 2,000 meters above sea level. So the poor pastor lived

The first time I saw him, he was lending a helping hand to repair the However, when he was gathering gravel on the side of a mountain road to do cement work with his pastor, he was caught in a sudden cliff collapse and was buried under the earth and sand.

He was dug out through the frantic efforts of the pastor and brought, unconscious, to a clinic in name only, located a long way away. Only one nurse (?) was stationed there. When he awoke a week later, he was a complete vegetable. When we heard about his accident, we did everything we could to help him recover. Even though we knew it was futile, we took him to Manila and admitted him to Makati Medical Center, the best hospital in the Philippines, for two months. But the doctor in charge informed us, "He is brain dead from lack of oxygen. There is no hope for him. He has only a few months to live.

We also did everything we could to help the families we left behind. They did not have a home of their own, so we built them a small house so they could live together. We encouraged all the churches we pioneered and worked together to find ways to support them. His wife gave birth to their third child before such support had even begun to materialize. Another boy, after a girl and a boy, on February 29, a day we will never forget.

One day, after several years, she was so distressed by the sight of her hopeless husband that she took her three children and ran off with another man. We had no way to comfort Ben, who was left alone in their small house, unable to move at all. The best we could do was to bring him to a church we had built in a relatively large town, work with the pastor to build another small house for him on the church grounds, and arrange for the congregation to take care of him.

It must have been about three years later. Little by little, Ben was able to speak, but very little. The university students from the church who took care of him came and spoke to him in English, and he was able to speak, albeit in broken English. His niece, who had come to take care of him, also began to attend church and believe in Jesus. Eventually, his mother was also saved. She was moved by seeing everyone's generous help. Many of her family members and relatives who had been pushing indigenous religions and denouncing the church became Christians. (It was much later that some of my relatives even became evangelists.)

It was on one such day that I received the news that his wife had passed away. I had gone to cut firewood in the mountains with a man I had gotten together with, and both of us were hit on the head by a fallen pine tree. When I came to him and found him lying by my bedside without a word of comfort, he said to me clearly in English. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Before I knew it, I

had a very firm faith. His three children, who had lost their mother, began to return to Ben's home, and a bright smile returned to his face. His eldest daughter was taking good care of them.

We left the Philippines in 1991, leaving him behind. We left the Philippines in 1991 because of our second son's illness. But I continued to visit the Philippines to see him. I also asked Japanese Christians for support for the education of their children. When was the time of my visit? I heard that his second son, born on February 29, had been hit by a car and died. As I leaned close to him without words, Ben said to me. 'The Lord gave and the Lord took. The Lord's name is praiseworthy."

I have never heard a single word of whining, resentment, or complaining from the mouth of a man who, before becoming a Christian, volunteered to work for the church and lost everything in an accident. Not a single word. Our cooperating evangelists and the congregation of the church we built helped him in various ways out of their poverty. I think I can understand why God put him through this.

The doctor had declared that he would not last a year, but he was gradually regaining his strength. At first, he started practicing to sit up by holding onto a swing-like object hanging from the ceiling with both hands. He also began to speak loudly when I visited him. He was always so excited that his whole body went into a state of violent convulsions, as if he were shadowboxing, and I had to hold him down, but he was steadily recovering.

Each of the two remaining children grew up to be a fine young man. In fact, he even started riding a wheelchair and working. He even started a job, breaking into the middle of crowded streets to call passengers to their respective destinations. He maneuvered his wheelchair through the hustle and bustle, called people, guided them to their cars, and got paid something for his trouble by the driver. It is a small income, but I believe it has been a great help in improving his physical and mental health. But just hearing about it, I was worried that he might get hit by a car.

Also around this time, he negotiated with the city office to rent a large, albeit old and dirty, building and set up a social gathering for the handicapped, and began to play an active role as its president. He started working to improve the status of the handicapped, as well as to think of various ways to encourage them to gather together, enjoy each other's company, and do manual labor. The town officials were amazed at how impressed he was.



On my next visit to the Philippines, I was even more surprised. He had gotten married. The next day I was even more surprised. I heard that they had a one year old child. In 1990, in Baguio City alone, there was a huge earthquake and tsunami that hit the city. She lost one of her legs in the earthquake that killed over 1,500 people, and she just turned 20!

I suppressed my impatience and rushed to the building for the handicapped, where I met Ben and his young wife. I was able to pick up my one-year-old boy in my arms and pray for thanksgiving and blessings. For free!

Ben with his family today, February 4, 2014.

Life in the Philippines must not be easy for those who are poor, have no education, and have severe physical disabilities. But with God's grace and encouragement from their brothers and sisters, they are now living strong.

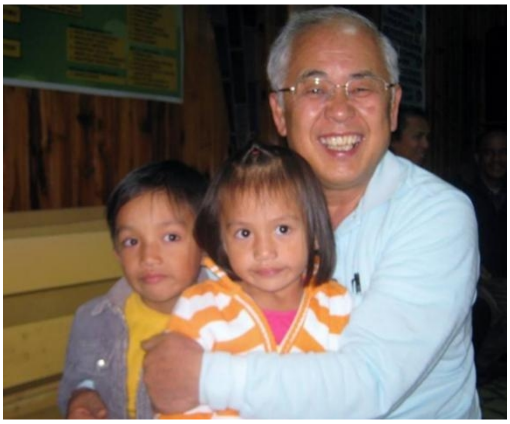
Last December (2013), when I contacted the pastors and said, "I'll be over there at the end of January," Ben's News came in. He now has two children, a six-year-old boy and a two-year-old girl.　I have never brought any souvenirs with me, but this time I decided to do so. A six-year-old boy and a two-year-old girl, right? I checked again. Okay, let's get some old clothes for these kids. Let's take some for Ben and his wife. Mr. Ben is a little smaller than me, about 163 cm. He is not fat. His wife is a petite woman, maybe no bigger than 150cm, and she's not fat either. ・・・・" I decided as I looked at the pictures I had taken of them. "For the kids, let's bring some tiny toys too ・・・・."

February 4, 2014 evening I was able to see Ben for the first time in a long time. His family is with us. I was invited to an evangelist seminar in a mountainous area in the northern Philippines and was chatting with many old faces. Mr. Ben is here! I was startled when I heard a voice saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I looked down to see Ben in his wheelchair being pushed up the steep hill by an escort. The church, built on a steep slope, was on the ground floor from the main entrance, but about three stories high from the lower parking lot. His wife, who was on crutches, started to climb the stairs with surprisingly light steps, followed by their two children, who were jumping up and down.

I shook hands with his wife after the climb, and as we greeted each other, I looked down the stairs.　Ben was climbing the stairs by himself. Holding on to the handrail, he was climbing slowly but surely, step by step. A man was standing beside him, ready to lend a hand at any time, but Ben was able to complete the climb by himself. As you can imagine, I was on the verge of tears. The brothers, who had been bedridden for many years due to brain death from lack of oxygen and had even been reduced to the state of a vegetable, had recovered to this level. The muscles in their legs are regaining strength.

A pleasant conversation ensued. I picked up the adorable children in my lap and told them stories. They were friendly children. The information given to me late last year by the pastor who had cared for them was incorrect: the older boy was 5 years old. The younger girl was 3. I wonder if the old clothes and toys I brought ・・・・・ would have helped. The oldest girl with his first wife is already an adult, married with children of her own. I also heard that his eldest son is an instructor at a body-building gym in Baguio City.

Ben and his wife had a very painful experience. God. Why? I'm sure there were times when he cried out, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But now I am filled with joy and hope. I know that when I am resurrected, I will be given a perfect body. Right now, I am still in pain. I am in pain because I live with many people who are in pain and suffering, and as someone who has experienced that pain and suffering most intensely, I am able to speak the gospel of Christ in a heart-to-heart communication. Ben's life has encouraged and led many people to salvation. Last year, a brother was taken to heaven after suffering from muscular dystrophy for over 30 years. He was one of those who was strongly encouraged by Ben's life. Those who can accept their suffering in relation to the gospel of God can make their suffering "suffering for Christ. (Philippians 1:29)



The conversation between Ben-san and me is posted on the Facebook page of missionary Hirokatsu Yoshihara, with photos and video.

About Mr. Ben Baran—Continued

2026/1/

It must have been about seven years after Ben's accident. Around that time, the travel agency that handled all of our family's documents—travel papers, residence permits, everything related to our legal status—strongly encouraged me to apply for permanent residency in the Philippines. They explained that among long-term foreign residents, the Philippine government selected applicants from certain countries and, if it judged that their presence benefited the country, granted them special permanent visas. Each country had a quota, and the screening was said to be very strict. Since I had intended to spend the rest of my life in the Philippines, I applied for the visa under the recommendation of what they called a "preferred travel agency." I was told that the screening process was extremely demanding. To my surprise, the applicant was required to appear in court and undergo a formal trial. All the necessary documents were kindly prepared free of charge by the travel agency. It was run by Christians who understood quite well what kind of work I was doing. Trusting their kindness, I appeared at the large courthouse in Manila on the appointed day. Someone from the agency came with me. What awaited me was a full-fledged trial.

A presiding judge sat in the center, with two judges on either side. There was a prosecutor's bench, where a relatively young prosecutor was seated. I was made to stand in the defendant's box and answer the prosecutor's sharp questions. Beside me stood an elderly lawyer assigned to my case. Fortunately, the entire proceeding was conducted in English. Apart from some legal terminology, I could follow most of what was happening. The prosecutor seemed to say that while he understood the explanation of my work, there was no concrete proof to support it, and that the case would need to be retried after such proof was prepared. Then the presiding judge asked me, "Do you have anything that can prove that your work is as described here?"

At that very moment, I remembered that my car was loaded with a large cardboard box full of photographs. They were all pictures documenting my work deep in the mountains—photos I had taken to report my activities to churches in Japan. I had brought them with me, thinking that someday, when I had time, I would organize them into albums. Philippine bureaucratic procedures usually take a long time—though I did not say that to the judges. Ironically, the trial itself had started exactly on time. At the judge's order, I brought in the box of photographs. The three judges, the prosecutor, and the lawyer examined them for a long time—comparing, passing them around, discussing among themselves. Finally, the presiding judge asked, "Please explain what these photographs show." They were a series of pictures taken when we carried Ben to a hospital in Manila—wrapping him in sheets to make a stretcher

and transporting him along steep, pathless mountain trails. I explained who Ben was. I told them that he was still alive, that he could now speak English, and that his children were attending school. After a long discussion among the judges, the prosecutor, and the lawyer, the hearing concluded. The lawyer turned to me with a broad smile and said, "Mr. Sasaki, you will win. The verdict will be issued later, but considering how far away you live, you will not need to appear again. We will inform the travel agency. Congratulations."

In this way, I became the first Japanese national to receive permanent residency in the Philippines. I later heard that many Japanese businessmen there wanted to buy such a visa for a large sum of money. Given the anything-goes atmosphere of the Philippines at the time, I suppose that might have been possible. In the end, however, I never actually received the visa. Because of my second son's illness, I had to return to Japan urgently. Since then, I have continued to live in Japan and work as a pastor. I have told Ben's story to many people, and it has been a great encouragement to them. Almost every year, I visited the Philippines with companions and made a point of seeing Ben.

Last year, in January 2025, I visited the Philippines again. Unfortunately, due to scheduling difficulties, I was unable to meet Ben and his family. I am now more than four years past surgery for rectal cancer. After the operation, metastasis to the liver was discovered—stage IV terminal cancer. Surgery was no longer possible, and I was given a short life expectancy. I sought a second opinion at a leading liver cancer hospital in Osaka, but the conclusion was the same. That prognosis has long since passed. Without telling my attending physician, I am planning to visit the Philippines again at the end of this month. If I were to die there, arrangements have been made for me to be buried on land owned by believers in the mountains. However, I hear that many crematoria have been built in Baguio City due to the large number of deaths during COVID-19, so that may be more practical. We are currently discussing this. This time, however, I am determined to meet Ben's family—and also the children from his first marriage. If that wish is fulfilled, I will have nothing more to ask for.

I have written at length about myself, and yet I have not fully written about Ben. My brain, never particularly sharp to begin with, has grown weaker. My body does not move as it once did. My fingers tremble, and typing takes five times longer than it used to—perhaps ten times longer. Still, there is something I must write down. Now that I am past eighty one, my way of seeing and thinking has changed greatly. I have come to feel deeply sorry for Ben's first wife.

The reason is simple: I had never been able to feel kindly toward her. She left her husband, who had become vegetative, taking their children and running off with a healthy man. I cannot recall her appearance at all. Natublem, where they lived, was at least a four-hour drive from my home. The accident happened shortly after she began attending church. I am not even sure whether I ever met her. Perhaps she appears somewhere in a video. But I truly have no memory of her face. When I spoke about Ben, I almost always ignored her story, mentioning only that she ran away with another man and later died

when she and that man were struck by a falling dead tree. I did not even know whether she had truly become a Christian after starting to attend church. To me, she was simply “the woman who abandoned her vegetative husband.” But last year—yes, around the middle of last year—another way of seeing her was born within me. More than forty years after the accident. As a pastor, I am ashamed of how long it took. I realized again that I had wronged her.

“Did she really abandon her husband because he became vegetative? Or was it something else?” I found myself returning to this question again and again. She had moved with her husband to that harsh mountain region. He worked as a hired farm laborer, and though they were poor, they lived happily. Then came the sudden accident. A husband reduced to a vegetative state. Two children, and then a nursing infant born after the accident. With no one to rely on, how was she to live? Perhaps she suffered so deeply that she could not even cry. Of course, she could not have known that we were desperately thinking and working to build a support system for her family—mobilizing all the churches we had planted, appealing to Christians in Japan. Having just begun attending church, there was no way she could have known any of this.

No matter how hard she thought, she could not have found a solution. Even with the famed resilience of the Igorot people, it would have been impossible. Then imagine: a man appears who says he will take care not only of her, but of her children as well. What would she have thought? Her mind must have been in turmoil. She loved her husband deeply. Their relationship had been close. I heard this many times from believers at the Natublan church who knew their life together well. And suddenly, this understanding came to me:

> she did not abandon her husband. She loved him. And because she loved him,
> She took an action that looked as though she had abandoned him.

Perhaps she believed that her husband would understand. Perhaps she thought, “He will surely understand why I must do this.” And I believe that Ben did understand. That is why he could say, without tears, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” If she had stayed with him, there would have been no way for any of them to live. Even in Japan, where social welfare is far more developed, her situation would have been unbearably harsh. How much more so in the Philippines—among a mountain people who were, in those days, almost forgotten by society.

She chose another man in order to keep alive and raise the children born of her love for her husband. She wanted to protect those children at all costs. For that reason, she may have felt she needed to be as good a woman as possible to the new man as well. As a mother, she instinctively acted out of love. She thought desperately. She thought with the resolve of someone ready to risk everything. For her husband and for the children born between them, she was willing to sacrifice herself. Perhaps she came to believe that this was how she could fulfill her love for her husband. No matter how others

judged her—criticized her, despised her, mocked her, condemned her, rejected her—she resolved to endure it all. Everything was for the sake of the man she loved and the children they had together.

What I have written here is not a question of whether this was truly so or not. What matters is that I have come to see her in this way—to respect her, and to accept her. God knows all things. God acts with full knowledge. Knowing everything, God dealt with her and with the man she went with, and permitted their deaths in that accident. For a long time, I felt as though that accident was an act of divine judgment, and I remained silent. But now I have come to think that it was not the hand of judgment, but the hand of mercy—the helping hand, the saving hand of God. It may not have been salvation unto eternal life. But perhaps it was an expression of compassion toward them.

I firmly believe—based on a more careful reading of Scripture—that God’s mercy extends to Ben’s deceased wife, and also to the man who went with her. This understanding differs from traditional Western Christian interpretations. It also differs from what is often called orthodox theology. Yet the more I ponder—ruminate on—the teachings of Scripture, the more convinced I become. When I think of God’s righteous judgment, God’s perfect fairness, and the God who continues to deal rightly even with those who have fallen into destruction after judgment itself— the woman whose face I cannot remember comes to seem to me a beautiful woman